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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002249

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GZ](#) [IS](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN](#) [AFFAIRS](#)
SUBJECT: PERCEPTIONS OF U.S. "GREEN LIGHT" FUEL ANGER AT
AL-RANTISI ASSASSINATION

Classified By: Pol/C Norm Olsen, per 1.4(b) and (d).

THIS IS A JOINT MESSAGE FROM CONGEN JERUSALEM AND EMBASSY TEL AVIV.

¶1. (C) Summary: Contacts throughout the Gaza Strip all concurred that the April 17 assassination of Hamas leader Abd al-Aziz al-Rantisi the March 22 assassination of Shaykh Ahmad Yasin and the Bush-Sharon summit were being viewed as a cumulative series of actions against the Palestinian people. Particularly in the aftermath of the April 15 Bush-Sharon meeting in Washington, the perception on the street was that United States had given Sharon the "green light" to carry out the attack. Palestinians, already furious at the exchange of letters between the U.S. and Israel that they interpret as evidence that the U.S. has now completely sided with Israel, have concluded that Israel does not want peace. Contacts predicted that there would be negative repercussions in ongoing talks between Hamas and the PA over their future relationship in the Gaza Strip after an Israeli withdrawal.
End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) In the aftermath of the April 18 assassination of Abd al-Aziz al-Rantisi in an IAF missile strike in Gaza City, militants' reactions in Gaza have been swift and heavy. According to the IDF, at least 37 mortars and rockets were fired at Israeli settlements and IDF outposts throughout the Strip since the assassination, and UNRWA has reports that at least six rockets were fired into Israel. The Israeli media reported that one settler had been injured, and a total of 14 Palestinians, including a nine-year-old girl, were wounded in Gaza when IDF soldiers returned fire.

¶3. (C) The reaction was no less vociferous in the political and social realms, with Palestinian outrage at the latest in a series of assassinations merging with what contacts referred to as the Palestinians' sense of betrayal following PM Sharon's meeting last week with President Bush. A journalist sympathetic to Hamas, Ghazi Hamad, told Poloff April 18 that the feeling among residents, political and apolitical alike, is that Israel will not withdraw from Gaza until it has succeeded in "punishing" each Palestinian in the Strip. The GOI's action affected the entire Palestinian situation, he added, not just that in Gaza. When asked how al-Rantisi's death would impact ongoing Hamas-PA talks, Hamad said, "Especially after the (Bush-Sharon) summit, there is no way now to talk about peaceful compromise. The language between all the factions now is completely different, because they (the factions) know that they are each of them a target." Israel, he added, will not leave Gaza until it is "clean" of Hamas. Hamas members, Hamad predicted, will now let nothing stop them.

¶4. (C) Jihad al-Wazir, deputy minister of planning in Gaza and son of assassinated PLO leader Abu Jihad, told Poloff April 19 that al-Rantisi's assassination was a direct and logical result of the April 15 Bush-Sharon meeting. That meeting, al-Wazir said, demonstrated that the U.S. could not say no to Sharon and, as a result, Sharon felt empowered to take whatever actions he wished. "By giving him (Sharon) carte blanche, you have let the bull loose in the china shop," al-Wazir said. Al-Wazir, a western-educated, PA pragmatist, elaborated, saying that the GOI had carried out the assassination of former Hamas leader Shaykh Ahmad Yasin after he had accepted the 1967 borders in the creation of a Palestinian state. Now, al-Wazir continued, Israel has killed Yasin's successor al-Rantisi just when Hamas was sitting together with the PA to work out the terms of their post-withdrawal relationship in Gaza. It is clear to everyone, al-Wazir concluded, that Israel is doing this to weaken the Palestinian people, not just Hamas. Furthermore, even though al-Rantisi was much more radical than Yasin, none of the remaining possible Hamas leaders has as much stature. Now, younger and even more radical individuals will move to the fore, al-Wazir predicted, and any nascent agreement reached with Muhammad Dahlan and the PA in recent days may well unravel.

¶5. (C) Al-Wazir outlined what he saw as a possible scenario: Hamas will do its utmost to carry out a large attack on an Israeli target at the earliest opportunity. Given the likely severity of any Hamas attack, and the perceived American "green light," the IDF will then respond "strategically rather than tactically", possibly even targeting Yasir

Arafat. While admittedly unsure whether or not Hamas had the capacity in the near term to carry out such a catastrophic attack against Israel, al-Wazir stressed that all focus is now on retaliation.

16. (C) A prominent Gaza businessman, Ahed Bseiso, wondered why Israel had hit al-Rantisi now, when Hamas had not retaliated for the strike that killed Shaykh Yasin. Prior to al-Rantisi's death, Bseiso said, he had the impression that Fatah's efforts to restrain Hamas had been working. Now, however, all bets were off. Palestinians are 100 percent convinced that Israel does not want peace, Bseiso concluded, adding that Palestinian anger and disappointment with the United States was palpable. Echoing the same sentiment, UNDP Deputy Representative Iman al-Wazir told Econoff April 19 that people were perhaps more upset that Sharon seems to have a free hand from the U.S. than at the actions themselves.

17. (SBU) These individual views of the assassination reflected harsh official statements that emerged over the weekend. Officials from PA Foreign Minister Nabil Sha'ath down to individual Hamas leaders all alleged U.S. complicity in the al-Rantisi assassination, drawing the link between the timing of the killing and the recent Bush-Sharon summit in Washington. Hamas, the Fatah-affiliated al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, and other, smaller groups all issued statements vowing to retaliate against Israel for the assassination.

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